DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 174 078 HE 011 418

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TITLE The Influence of Student Recruitment Activities: Relationship between Experiencing an Activity and Enrollment. AIR Forum 1979 Paper.
PUB DATE May 79
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research (19th, San Diego, California, May 13-17, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Admission; College Bound Students; *College Choice; *Enrollment Influences; Higher Education; Institutional Research; *Private Colleges; Research Projects; *Student Recruitment
IDENTIFIERS *AIR Forum 1979; *College Applicants

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to help discern the relationship between various student recruitment activities and enrollment. A set of 10 recruitment activities utilized by the office of admissions at a private selective undergraduate institution of about 2300 students was selected for analysis. The activities were classified as on-campus contacts and off-campus contacts. The subjects were the 1311 accepted applicants for admission to the class of 1981. Questionnaires were sent to the 561 enrollees (those who paid the admissions deposit) and the 750 non-enrollees. The findings indicate that there is almost no relationship between the off-campus contacts and enrollment yield, while moderate correlations between on-campus contacts and enrollment yield were observed. The study results identify the need for colleges to evaluate on a continuous basis the effectiveness of recruitment activities they employ. (SW)

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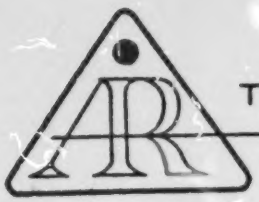

THE ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This paper was presented at the Nineteenth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Town and Country Inn in San Diego, California, May 13-17, 1979. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of Forum papers.

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The Influence of Student Recruitment Activities: Relationship between Experiencing an Activity and Enrollment

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The Influence of Student Recruitment Activities: Relationship between Experiencing an Activity and Enrollment

Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to report on the findings of a study designed and conducted to help discern the relationship between experiencing various student recruitment activities and enrollment. The accepted applicants for the class of approximately 2,300 students were the subjects of this study. Survey instruments were mailed to the population of accepted applicants during the summer of 1977. The findings indicated that there is almost no relationship between the off-campus contacts and enrollment yield, while moderate correlations between on-campus contacts and enrollment yield were observed. Enrollees were defined as those who paid the admissions deposit.

The Influence of Student Recruitment Activities:

Relationship between Experiencing an Activity and Enrollment

Research on college-going behavior has been conducted along two basic lines of inquiry. One dimension has been concerned with the identification of determinants of college attendance, while the other dimension has focused upon the process of selecting a particular college or university.

Cohn and Morgan have discerned two approaches to studies concerned with the determinants of college attendance, or student demand (1978). These approaches are the economic and the sociological. The economic approach advances the notion that students enroll in college because of its long-run profitability, where as the sociological approach hypothesizes the influence of the social and economic status of the prospective student. Econometric models were utilized by Radner and Miller to examine the relationship between student demand and institutional type (1975). They identified the following four variables which help explain demand: cost, family income, student academic ability and institutional selectivity. Anderson, Bowman and Tinto viewed the issue of geographic accessibility and college attendance from the sociological perspective (1972). The major finding of this study was that college attendance was more closely associated with student ability and family socioeconomic status than with geographic proximity of a college or university. Moreover, Anderson et al found that for students of lower academic ability and lower socioeconomic status, geographic proximity is not a sufficient condition for college attendance. Rather, college attendance is related to low tuition costs, minimal admissions requirements and the availability of remedial programs. The process of selecting a particular college or university is a complex interaction of various forces (Feldman and Newcomb, 1969). Richards and Holland found that six basic factors undergrided considerations which affect student choice of particular colleges (1965). These six

factors of colleges were intellectual emphasis; practicality (costs, location); advice of others; social emphasis; emphasis on religious and ethical values; and school size. The influence of college image and financial aid are aspects related to one or more of these six basic factors. Chapman found that the amount and mix of financial aid at one institution tended to have an impact upon the college choice behavior of financial aid recipients (1979). Silber and Coelbo discerned that the student's perception of the image of a college tends to be of importance in the college choice process (1961). An image of a college can be gleaned from college catalogues, college representatives, college nights arranged by high schools, campus visits, and information from friends, parents, teachers and high school counselors.

Underlying the various forces identified above are recruitment activities employed in the admissions-recruitment process. To a large degree, such recruitment activities are the media through which a student considers the various factors attendant to the choice of a particular college or university.

Research on the influence of student recruitment activities has been concerned with student perceptions of the effectiveness of such activities (Gorman, 1976). Gorman's study focused upon the perceptions of students who had already enrolled and who had also experienced a given activity. The foci of Gorman's research raises a question as to whether or not the experiencing of various recruitment activities actually influences an accepted student to enroll. Put in different words, would an accepted applicant enroll if a given activity was not observed or experienced by the student? This question needs to be addressed not only for the advancement of knowledge on the influence of recruitment activities, but also for the development of effective recruitment activities by college and university offices of admissions.

During the 1980's, a decline in the enrollment of traditional age (18 to 21 year olds) full-time degree students in U.S. institutions of higher learning

is expected. Concomitant with this anticipated enrollement decline will be an increase in competition among colleges and universities to enroll the traditional aged student. In some measure, perhaps to a significant extent, the degree of success which each institution experiences in the competition will be a function of the effectiveness of the process of student recruitment employed by each college or university.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to report the findings of a study designed and conducted to help describe the relationship between experiencing or not experiencing various recruitment activities and enrollment in a given institution.

Admissions--Recruitment Activities

The process of student recruitment is composed primarily of a set of activities conducted or arranged by an office of college or university admissions. The primary objectives of these activies are (1) to attract an institutionally acceptable student prospect to submit an application for admissions, and (2) to help influence the accepted applicant to enroll.

Recruitment activities are designed, in the broadest sense, to communicate information about the institution to the prospective student. Information concerning all dimensions of a college or university are conveyed through these activities. Moreover, a student who experiences one or more recruitment activities is able to form to some extent, an image of the institution.

A set of 10 recruitment activities utilized by the office of admissions at a private selective undergraduate institution of approximately 2300 students were selected for analysis in this study. These activities were classified into two categories based upon the type of the contact made with a prospective student. These categories were on-campus contacts and off-campus contacts. Activities categorized as being on-campus contacts were campus visit; interview with an admissions officer; student guided campus tour; classroom visitation; over-

night visit in a residence hall; and pre-college on-campus seminar. The following four recruitment activities were classified as off-campus contacts: telephone call from a current student; telephone call from a faculty member; telephone call from an admissions staff member; and contact with an institutional representative at high schools (high school visit).

Methodology

Research Questions

The following ten question provided the framework for this study. What is the relationship between:

1. having or not having a campus visit and the enrollment of an accepted applicant for admission?
2. having or not having an interview with an admissions officer and the enrollment of an accepted applicant for admissions?
3. having or not having a student guided campus tour and the enrollment of an accepted applicant for admission?
4. visiting or not visiting a classroom and the enrollment of an accepted applicants for admission?
5. receiving or not receiving a telephone call from a current student and the enrollment of an accepted applicant for admission?
6. receiving or not receiving a telephone call from a faculty member and the enrollment of an accepted applicant for admission?
7. receiving or not receiving a telephone call from an admissions staff member and the enrollment of an accepted applicant for admission?
8. having or not having contact with an institutional representative at one's high school and the enrollment of an accepted applicant for ad-
9. having or not having an overnight visit in a residence hall and the enrollment of an accepted applicant for admission?

10. attending or not attending a pre-college seminar on campus and the enrollment of an accepted applicant for admission?

Subjects

Accepted applicants for admission to the class of 1981 of a private selective undergraduate institution of approximately 2300 students were the subjects of this study. The group of accepted applicants was composed of two categories: (1) accepted applicants who had paid their $100 admissions deposit as of June 27, 1977 (enrollees); and (2) accepted applicants who had withdrawn their applicants as of June 27, 1977 (non-enrollees). The population of enrollees and non-enrollees, as defined above, were selected to participate.

Data Source

The data source for this study was two survey instruments which operationalized the research questions of this study. Separate instruments were constructed for enrollees and for non-enrollees.

The survey instruments were mailed during the summer of 1977 to the population of both enrollees and non-enrollees. A total of 561 questionnaires were mailed to the total group of enrollees. Completed forms were received from 558 of the enrollees, for a response rate of 99%. Questionnaires were mailed to a total group of 750 non-enrollees of which 522 non-enrollees returned usable forms.

This represents a response rate of 70%. These relatively high rates were realized using follow-up techniques developed by Leslie (1970).

Data Analysis

A 2 x 2 contingency table design was used to help answer each of the 10 research questions of this study. The two classes of variables used were experiencing an activity and enrollment. Experiencing an activity was dichtomized into two levels: did experience (1) and did not experience an activity (0). Enrollment was also dichtomized into two levels: enrolled (1) and did not enroll (0). Measures of association were derived from the ten sets of contingency tables,

one, for each research question using the phi coefficient for nominal-dichotomous data.

Results

Phi coefficients were calculated for each of the 10 recruitment activities. The coefficients obtained are exhibited in Table 1 below.

(Insert Table 1 here.)

The phi coefficients displayed in Table 1 indicate that none of the 10 recruitment activities have a high association between experiencing an activity and enrollment. However, on-campus activities tend to have a moderate association between experiencing an activity and enrollment. To be more specific, there is a moderate association between an accepted applicant visiting the campus; visiting a class; having a student-guided campus tour; spending the night in a college residence hall; having an interview with an admission officer; or attending a pre-college seminar and enrollment at the institution

Thus, on-campus recruitment activities appear to have a moderate influence on the enrollment of an accepted applicant.

The results in Table 1 indicate that there is little or almost no association between an accepted applicant receiving a telephone call from an admissions officer; receiving a telephone call from a faculty member; receiving a telephone call from a current student; or having contact with an institutional representative at one's high school and enrollment. Thus, this group of low phi coefficients suggests that off-campus contacts have almost no influence in the enrollment of an accepted applicant.

It is somewhat difficult to compare the findings of this research with those of Gorman (1976). The difficulty, as previously stated in this paper, involves

the unit of analysis employed. A sample of first quarter freshmen already enrolled were the units of analysis in Gorman's study, whereas both enrollees and non-enrollees were the unit of analysis in this study. Thus, the recruitment activities in Gorman's study were influential only to the enrolled student or to the undecided student according to the sample of enrolled students.

Despite the differences in design, it is noted that Gorman found present students and campus visits to be the most influential activities in attracting students. Thus, the campus visit as an influential activity emerges in the results of both studies. However, Gorman found that personal telephone calls to prospective students were assessed by 82% of his sample as being a good to excellent method to attract undecided students. This finding is inconsistent with the low association between telephone calls and enrollment found in this study. The differences in design and institutional setting may account for this inconsistency.

Discussion and Limitations

There are two basic limitations to this study which indicate a need for caution in the discussion of the results. First, this study was exploratory and does not intend causality. The second limitation pertains to the external validity of this study, as the results can be generalized only to accepted applicants (enrollees and non-enrollees) of selective, private institutions of medium size. Nevertheless, the findings of this study can be discussed within the context of these two limitations.

The moderate associations found for on-campus recruitment activities as contrasted with low associations observed for off-campus activities may be explained in terms of the concept of college image (Silber et al, 1961). Although both categories of recruitment activities involve the communication of verbal information to the prospective student, only on-campus activities provide the

prospective student with the opportunity to experience firsthand the total environment of the college. Thus, the prospective student is aided in his or her attempt to match his or her needs and aspirations with the image they have formed of the college through a visit to the campus.

Another explanation, however, is that the association between on-campus activities and enrollment is not because of the influence of this set of activities, but because some of the enrollees visited the campus as the institution of this study was either among their principal choices or was their first choice college. Thus, the moderate associations focused between each of the six recruitment activities and enrollment could be tautological.

In contrast, off-campus recruitment activities, especially telephone calls, provide only a limited image of the college to the prospective student. In other words, the image formed is dependent upon the type of information about the college communicated and the type of questions and answers exchanged during a telephone conversation or a high school visit.

The results of this study have implications for further research in the influence of recruitment activities. First, this study needs to be replicated in a diversity of institutions as the influence of these activities may vary by the type of the institution. The findings of the Anderson et al (1972) suggest that students of lower academic and lower socioeconomic status may be less concerned with the image of the college in terms of person-environment fit and more concerned with costs, admissions requirements and remedial programs. Thus, off-campus recruitment activities employed by community colleges and four-year institutions of low selectivity might have a greater association with enrollment than when used by a selective, private college or university.

The second implication is the need for studies which would help to discern the relationship between choice hierarchy (first choice, second choice, undecided) and experiencing an activity and its effects upon enrollment. Such inquires

would help determine whether of not on-campus activities influence students to enroll at a given institution.

The study did not examine the effects of interaction among the ten recruitment activities and enrollment. Future studies should use multivariant statistical techniques to test for interaction effects. This is the third implication for further research. Such an approach could help identify a structure of influence of recruitment activities upon enrollment. A knowledge of such a structure would have practical implications not only for the design of admissions-recruitment strategies and programs, but also have implications for research on the process of student recruitment.

A fourth implication is the need for studies which would focus upon the influence of recruitment activities and the submission of an application for admission. This study focused only upon accepted applicants. Different patterns of results might be found for off-campus activities and the submission of an application. As a group of activities, off-campus contacts--telephone calls and high school visits--may have a higher degree of association with the submission of an application than with enrollment.

The fifth and most fundamental implication for further research pertains to the concept of college image. Future studies should utilize the notion of college image as a framework for examining the influence of recruitment activities. Moreover, the linkage between the formation of an image of a college and the current interest in better information for student choice of college should also be explored.

Conclusion

Each of six on-campus recruitment activities were found to have a moderate association with enrollment, while each of four off-campus activities have little or no association with enrollment. These findings suggest that selective under-

graduate institutions of medium size should not focus off-campus recruitment activities upon accepted applicants as the expediture of admissions staff time and admissions-recruitment funds would be expeded on activities which have low enrollment yield.

The results of this study identify the need for colleges and universities to evaluate on a continuous basis the effectiveness of recruitment activities employed by their offices of admissions-recruitment. The identification of effective recruitment activities may be an important factor in the success an institution experiences in the competition for student enrollments in the 1980's.

Table 1

Phi Coefficients of Experiencing Recruitment Activities and Enrollment

Recruitment Activities	
on-campus	
campus visit	.39
classroom visit	.31
interview with admissions staff member	.17
overnight visit in residence hall	.20
pre-college seminar	.28
student guided campus tour	.25
off-campus	
contact with institutional representative at high school	.01
telephone call from admissions staff member	.03
telephone call from a current student	.01
telephone call from a faculty member	.05

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